

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 HA-05 AGRE-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 2934

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM, ELAB, KS

SUBJ: CATHOLIC BISHOPS DEFEND CHRISITAN LABOR PROGRAMS

REF: SEOUL 2559 (DTG 290638Z MAR 78)

SUMMARY: THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE ISSUED A STATEMENT ON THE LABOR SITUATION IN KOREA WHICH WAS CIRITICAL OF SOME ASPECTS OF ROKG POLICY. ROKG REACTION NOT YET AVAILABLE.

1. ON APRIL 10 CARDINAL KIM RELEASED A STATEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC BISHOP'S CONFERENCE ON CURRENT LABOR ISSUES. THE STATEMENT WHICH HAD BEEN APPROVED BY THE NATION'S BISHOPS ON APRIL 8, WAS WRITTEN IN MEASURED, UNPOLEMIC STYLE BUT CONTAINED SOME POINTS WHICH DEMONSTRATED A HIGHER DEGREE OF CRITICISM OF THE ROKG THAN THE BISHOPS HAD PREVIOUSLY EXPRESSED.

2. THE BISHOPS REFERRED TO RECENT INSTANCES, SPECIFICALLY THE TONGIL TEXTILE INCIDENT, WHERE THEY BELIEVE WORKERS HAD SUFFERED OPPRESSION AND LOSS OF THEIR JOB "BECAUSE THEY ENGAGED IN TRADE UNION ACTIVITY IN THE NAME OF
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CHRISTIANITY OR EVEN SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY WERE CHRISTIANS." THIS WAS SIGNIFICANT BECAUSE THE BISHOPS CONFERENCE HAD NOT BEEN WILLING TO BE DRAWN INTO INVOLVEMENT IN SPECIFIC LABOR PROBLEMS BEFORE -- EVEN OBLIQUELY. THE PROBABLE CAUSE IN THIS INSTANCE WAS LIKELY THE MOVE TAKEN BY TONGIL TEXTILE MANAGEMENT TO REHIRE DISMISSED WORKERS ONLY IF THEY WOULD SIGN A STATEMENT PLEDGING TO STAY

AWAY FROM THE UIM AND FROM RELATED PRAYER MEETINGS.

3. THE BISHOPS NOTED THAT ANTI-UIM PROPAGANDA IN LEAF-LETS OR LECTURES BECAME PROMINENT WHEN INCIDENTS OF LABOR UNREST OCCURRED. THEY PROTESTED THAT THIS PROPAGANDA DEPICTED CHRISTIAN LABOR ACTIVITIES AS COMMUNIST-INSPIRED. THEY ADDED, "WE CANNOT HELP EXPRESSING OUR CONCERN OVER THE FACT THAT THESE PAMPHLETS ARE DISTRIBUTED AND LECTURES ARE HELD IN THE OPEN WITH APPARENT CONNIVANCE AND EVEN THE PROTECTION OF THE AUTHORITIES." COMMENT: WHILE A NUMBER OF BISHOPS QUESTION THE APPROPRIATENESS OF THE WORK OF CHRISTIAN LABOR ACTIVISTS, THEY HAVE UNITED BEFORE IN DEFENDING THE CHURCH'S RIGHT TO ENGAGE IN SOCIAL PROGRAMS, INCLUDING THOSE FOR WORKERS. THE NEW ELEMENT HERE IS THE CLEAR ACCUSATION OF ROKG CONNIVANCE IN ANTI-CHRISTIAN LABOR PROPAGANDA.

4. THE BISHOPS ASKED THAT A) ALL FIRED WORKERS INCLUDING CHRISTIANS BE REHIRED; B) ALL LABOR UNIONS BE PERMITTED TO FUNCTION NORMALLY INCLUDING THE TONGIL TEXTILE BRANCH UNION (THIS UNION WAS INTERVENED BY THE NATIONAL TEXTILE WORKERS UNION IN ACCORD WITH ITS CHARTER); C) ALL PROPAGANDA WHICH DEPICTS CHRISTIAN LABOR ACTIVITIES AS COMMUNIST INSPIRED BE SUPPRESSED; D) ROKG POLICIES FOR THE ELIMINATION OF LOW WAGES AND CONFIDENTIAL

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WORKERS WELFARE BE IMPLEMENTED WITH COURAGE. THE BISHOPS CALLED FOR NATIONAL SOLIDARITY AND A SENSE OF COMMUNITY, URGED THE WORKERS TO PERSEVERE AND COOPERATE WITH MANAGEMENT UNLESS MANAGEMENT'S DEMANDS WERE EXCESSIVE, AND EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT THE GOVERNMENT AND THE PEOPLE WILL WORK AS ONE TO CREATE A BRIGHT FUTURE.

5. THE ROKG MAY BE ABLE TO RESPOND TO SOME OF THESE DEMANDS. ABOUT ONE HUNDRED OF THE TONGIL GIRLS WHO LOST THEIR JOBS ARE BEING HOUSED BY THE UIM IN INCHON AND HAVE NOT YET DISPERSED TO THEIR HOMES. SINCE THEY ARE AVAILABLE, IT IS POSSIBLE ALTHOUGH NOT PROBABLE THAT MANAGEMENT MIGHT BE PRESSURED TO TAKE THEM BACK. NORMALIZATION OF THE TONGIL BRANCH UNION IS POSSIBLE, BUT THE RESULTS MAY NOT MEET THE EXPECTATIONS OF CHRISTIAN LABOR ACTIVISTS. THE ROKG IS ALREADY GIVING CONSIDERABLE PUBLICITY TO ITS PROGRAMS TO RAISE WAGES TO A 30 THOUSAND WON PER MONTH LEVEL IN ALL BUT THE SMALLEST ENTERPRISES. THE ROKG CAN LET UP ON ITS CONTRIBUTION TO ANTI-UIM PROPAGANDA, BUT NOT ALL ANTI-UIM CRITICISM COMES FROM THE ROKG.

6. THE BISHOPS' STATEMENT WILL BE WIDELY CIRCULATED
IN THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY -- BOTH CATHOLIC AND
PROTESTANT. KOREA PRESS HAS NOT YET REPORTED BISHOPS'
STATEMENT.
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